

Heart-stopping, spine-tingling,

HOR

To the less faint-hearted among us horror movies offer the fear of the unknown or the incomprehensible, and a delicious shiver-in-the-night thrill.

by Tom Salisbury



blood-curdling, flesh-crawling, **ROR**

LONG before the days of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* or Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's Frankenstein monster, horror enjoyed splendid commercial mileage. Legends of witches and headless highwaymen, chain-clanking ghosts and fire-breathing dragons are as persistent and more invincible — and in a perverse way, more beloved — than stores involving conventional heroes. There is no horror so ghastly that a fertile imagination cannot conjure it up. Yet despite this amazing agility of the mind's eye, "horror" was to find its apotheosis in still another form of vision.

The element of the supernatural and inexplicable found its perfect medium in the cinema, where the camera's wilful art of deception could fleece the eye as skilfully as a circus shill, regaling the audience with visions of magic and cinematic sleights of hand that would hold them in thrall for the next 80-odd years. It is no accident that the birth of the horror film occurred almost simultaneously with the invention of *la cinematographe* at the turn of the century, and indeed for many audiences throughout the world, served as their first introduction to the medium.

The Devil's Castle

The year was 1896, and cinematography as a form of expression was barely a year old. Only a few months earlier, the brothers Lumiere had created a "scientific apparatus" that recorded movement by rapid photography. (The brothers' modest first cinematic effort, a filmed record of a steam train pulling into a Paris station, is said to have created such a sensation that women fainted at the sight).

Fittingly, the first spectre to cast its fearsome image on the screen was the Prince of Darkness himself, *aka* Satan, *aka* Mephistopheles: the enduring epitome of evil throughout recorded history.

The Devil's Castle, all of three minutes in length, played on Christmas Eve and cast its spell over the regular patrons of the little Theatre Robert Houdin in Paris. In the film's highlight, a huge black bat

Lon Chaney Snr in Max Factor make-up as the Phantom of the Opera.

flies into a castle room, flapping its monstrous ribbed wings, and suddenly metamorphoses into a sneering, suavely sinister Mephistopheles.

Over and above other feats of legerdemain that featured in the three-minute film, the magical bat-to-Beelzebub transformation heralded the advent of still more diabolical wonders to come in the pageant of the horror film.

The creator of *The Devil's Castle* — both as producer/director and as Mephistophelian lead — was Georges Melies, sometime shoe manufacturer and cartoonist who had parlayed a sideline as stage-show illusionist into a respectably lucrative career. Melies, one of the first to foresee the wondrous possibilities of the Lumiere brothers' newfangled contraption, is credited in the horror film anthologies as the father of the form. And

with good reason: by 1900, when he had completed some 244 short films, Melies had successfully experimented with and evolved virtually every technological contrivance that was to become standard horror film fare. By the time other exponents came to follow his footsteps, he had explored every cinematic trick in the book: split screens, double exposures, slow dissolves and fade-ins or -outs, work with models, work with miniatures — not to mention costume and make-up grotesquerie. As a horror film pioneer, Melies covered a lot of ground, and there was very little left for his successors to discover.

Because of Melies, the horror film was born almost full-grown. Its evolution has depended less on technological innovations than on its changing

Continued on page 6

HORROR

Continued from page 5

audience throughout the years. It seems almost superfluous to say that what raised goosebumps among audiences of 50 years ago would raise only a yawn from today's considerably more jaded moviegoers. Sensitivities and sensibilities have grown calloused over the years with exposure to the vastly more frightening nightmare of real wars.

Sci-fi Horror

The first forays into cinematic horror dealt with familiar "monsters" already well established in literature. Robert Louis Stevenson's classic, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, was an early favourite, produced first in 1908 in America (and again in 1912, this time by the movie company of Thomas Edison), and in 1909 in Copenhagen.

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein monster made its first screen appearance in a one-reeler produced by the Edison Company. (Lamentably, no record exists of the world's first "horror stars"; the practice of screen credits had not yet materialised.)

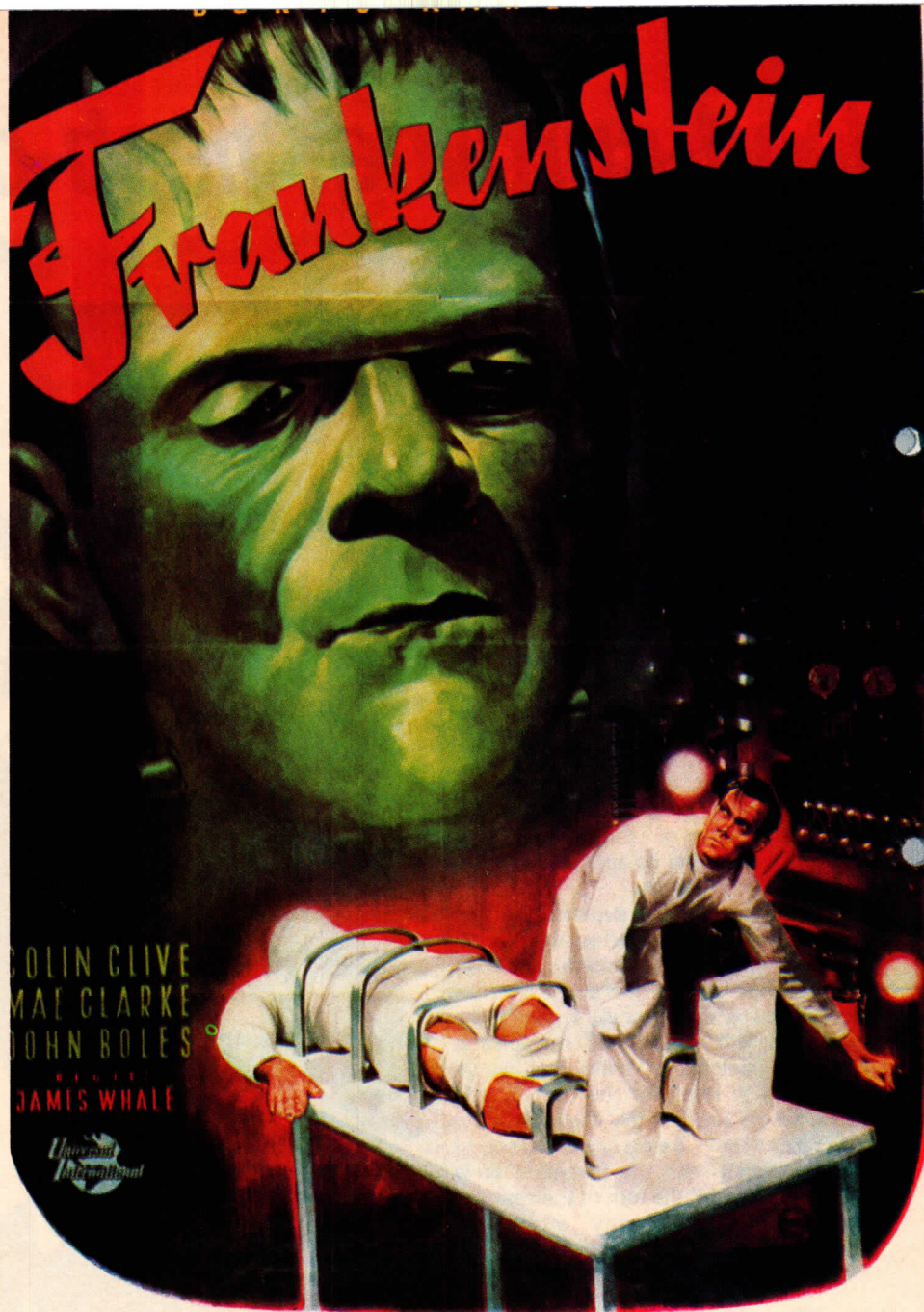
Sci-fi in its most primitive form also came into being in those early years, with screen adaptations of stories by H. G. Wells and Jules Verne: the official first science fiction film, *Battle in the Clouds*, was made in Britain in 1909 and synthesised the ideas of both writers.

Major influences at this time came from Germany, and in two disparate forms. One was a sensitive, gifted actor who was to become, after Melies, the single most influential force in the art form; and the other was a film, made in 1919 and hailed today as one of the great classics in the history of horror films.

The Cabinet of Dr Caligari opened in Berlin in 1920 and in America a year later; the response on both continents was instantaneous and electric. It is said to have been the first film to be "taken seriously by the intellectuals"; it also reputedly gave birth to Expressionism in cinema.

The film's overpowering force was its mood of surrealism created by its tortured, expressionistic sets and its angst-ridden account of deadly mayhem in an insane asylum. Even today, the experts say, *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* has the power to grip its audience — a claim few better-remembered films can make.

Paul Wegener came on the scene a few years earlier. As a featured actor in the short German film *The Student of Prague* (also titled *A Bargain with Satan*), released in 1913, Wegener won instant attention from the critics. One ecstatic reviewer wrote: "Perhaps the most remarkable feature (of *The Student of Prague*) is the



superb performance of Herr Paul Wegener. In his last fantastic flight from the spectre he conveys an expression of terror which is irresistibly communicated to the spectator."

Wegener went on to become a prime moving force in horror cinema both as star and as director. His work is said to have inspired other intellectuals to take up the art form; one of these was the renowned German director Fritz Lang, who in turn was to have a profound influence on later exponents, notably Raoul Walsh and Alfred Hitchcock.

Wegener's most memorable contribution, however, was a role that was to become indelibly identified with him — a role that would be the forerunner of the monster-as-a-sympathetic-figure, ultimately creating the mould that would later be echoed by creations like Boris Karloff's Frankenstein monster.

Wegener found his inspiration in a clay giant of Jewish legend. As the story went, "Golem" had been created by a 16th century rabbi to protect his people against an evil emperor. The clay statue is activated — and disarmed — by a star-shaped amulet on its chest. In *Der Golem* (produced in 1914), Wegener — who also produced and directed the film — played the title role as a hulking, heavy-booted creature lumbering awkwardly through the streets, unwittingly leaving terror and destruction in its wake. It was, the experts declare, a key work in the monster genre.

Hollywood Horror

Despite Wegener's acknowledged influence through this and other subsequent films he made, he is little more than a footnote to all but the most committed horror-film buffs. Across the

Atlantic, Hollywood's star-making mills were just beginning to grind, and a new watershed in horror movie-making was in sight. Within a span of 12 years, no less than three horror "superstars" were born; three names that were to become the proverbial household words in the realm of horror cinema.

The first of these was Lon Chaney, who in time justifiably earned himself the epithet of "The Man of a Thousand Faces". A bit player working on the fringes of, first, the stage, and later, the movies, Chaney attracted little attention until he appeared as a twisted cripple in a film called *The Miracle Man* (1919).

Fame came swiftly, and today Chaney is billed as the first real star of the horror silents; indeed, of the horror film. He went on to play such roles as a horribly disfigured Quasimodo in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*; and the mad owner of a waxworks museum in *While Paris Sleeps* (also titled *The Glory of Love*), the precursor of the "waxwork horror" genre.

The role that defines Chaney today, of course, is that of the grotesque, organ-playing spectre in the 1925 classic *The Phantom of the Opera*. Although he recreated more than a hundred roles in as many silent films (and one talkie, *The Unholy Three*, before he succumbed to throat cancer in 1930), the Phantom remains Chaney's most enduring image, and the role that has earned him his well-deserved niche in horror's hall of fame.

The horror anthologies describe Chaney's make-up artistry in *The Phantom* and other films in painstaking detail (in Chaney's time, union rules protecting the dominion of the make-up man were not yet in force). The horrible faces he brought to life on the screen were a product of his own genius, and ultimately a contribution to his immortality.

Chaney went to great pains — both literally and figuratively — to achieve the gruesome effects he sought. To create the image of a "living skull" for the Phantom, for instance, he fashioned hairpin-shaped wires to run up his nose and flare his nostrils, and stuffed cotton wadding and acetate discs deep into his mouth to heighten the cheekbones. Small metal prongs attached to protruding false teeth drew his mouth back at the corners in a ghastly rictus grin.

His creation of the hunchbacked Quasimodo was no less tortured: for the role, he donned a 14kg breastplate harnessed to an 18kg rubber hump. Once in his costume, Chaney was unable to stand upright; the harness was so painful it had to be removed between takes. When the film was finished, he had suffered so badly that he required three months' hospitalisation.

Chaney's skill in gruesome make-up was consummate, but his artistry was



endowed with something more: a great gift of depth and sensitivity that he brought to every portrayal, and which was palpable on the screen. Audiences reacted with empathy and acceptance.

Film historians have made much of the fact that Chaney was born to deaf-mute parents, speculating that this background honed him for his sensitive performances. Whatever the truth of this premise, Chaney left a lasting mark as the first and one of the true great stars of horror films. Years later, his son would achieve fame only when he agreed to bill himself as Lon Chaney, Jr.

Dracula

Chaney was one of the few stars of silent films to make the successful transition to talkies in the early 30s. Relieved that his screen voice registered well (sound was the personal monster of many unluckier stars), Universal Studios (Chaney's home company) had even bigger things in store for him. One of the biggest was the first "official" cinematic depiction of Bram Stoker's immortal vampire, Dracula.

In 1922, a thinly-disguised version of the Transylvanian ghoul, entitled *Nosferatu*, had been made in Germany. Starring the reedy, spectral-faced Max Shreck as Count Orlok — the names, but not much else, were changed — *Nosferatu* is today regarded as one of the great classics of horror cinema: in its time, however, it earned the ignominy of a successful lawsuit brought against it by Bram Stoker's widow.

Ironically, Stoker's classic was first published in 1897: the year after Melies' Mephistopheles first startled cinema audiences. Now, in 1931, Hollywood had decided the time was ripe to bring the Prince of Vampires to the screen. The choice of Chaney to play the role had been a foregone conclusion; but at the prime of his career, Chaney died. The search was on for a successor to his title

as master of horrors.

Bela Lugosi didn't quite take up that mantle — Boris Karloff was to overshadow him in barely five years' time — but his sinister, brooding Slavic looks won him the part of Dracula that was to become his trademark and, today, his one enduring claim to fame.

The anthologies cite Lugosi's beginnings as an actor in the silents, screen-named Aristid Olt in his homeland of Hungary. His thick, almost impenetrable Hungarian accent was an important key to his successful portrayal of the bloodthirsty Count. It is recounted that he steadfastly refused to learn English, preferring to memorise his lines phonetically. The result was a measured, mesmeric delivery that was to define many a Dracula portrayal for years afterward. But it was also to be a factor accounting for his shortlived career.

Lugosi's star fell as fast as it rose, and although he went on to make more than 60 films until his death in 1956, he was reduced in his last few films to the humiliation of playing bit parts, only the lingering magic of his name surviving his downslide. His last film, *Plan Nine from Outer Space*, was a depressing nadir — it is often included in lists of history's worst movies.

But in 1931, Lugosi was Dracula. A chalk-white face, cruelly arched eyebrows, a thin, pasty smile and a flowing cape as ominous as bat wings were his only accoutrements — for Lugosi, unlike his predecessor, disdained make-up. The only "outside help" he got was a pair of pencil-thin spotlights shone into his eyes to heighten the hypnotic effect, a device contrived by *Dracula*

Continued on page 8



HORROR

Continued from page 6

Freaks, that was decades ahead of its time in style and content. *Freaks'* theme was so repellent to its audiences that it was not released for many years, and was repudiated by the studio that produced it, MGM.)

It is said that one of Lugosi's eye-spotlights was perennially off the mark, but that mattered little to his completely captivated audience. Although vampire themes were nothing new — Chaney himself had played the first American screen vampire in *London After Midnight* (1927), directed by Browning — Count Dracula was the most famous of the genre, and Bela Lugosi his first incarnation. Lugosi rode high on the crest of his fame. That same year, he was asked to bring another famous monster to life on the screen.

Frankenstein

The generally told story is that Lugosi tried out for, and ultimately rejected, the role of the monster in *Frankenstein* because it called for heavy make-up that he did not like to wear. The role eventually went to a bit player, an Englishman named William Pratt (discovered, it is said, in a studio canteen by Universal head Carl Laemmle, who professed himself "fascinated" by the haunted look in Pratt's eyes and his "queer, penetrating personality"). The world would know him as Boris Karloff.

Years later, Karloff was to say of the monster: "The part was . . . a natural. Any actor who played it was destined for success."

Film historians maintain Karloff was too modest; he possessed a serious craftsmansmanship that imbued the role with pathos and eloquence, recalling the pitiable, lumbering giant of Paul Wegener's *Golem*.

The Frankenstein monster had another genius behind its immortalisation: make-up wizard Jack Pierce, who combined anatomical research and a character study of Dr Frankenstein, the monster's creator, to fashion the look that would become the definitive man-made monster. The crude, flat-topped head was shaped with layers of rubber and cotton, the face plastered with blue-green greasepaint that photographed a corpse-like grey. Two metal "electrodes" fixed on Karloff's neck were so tight that the scars remained for years afterward. His legs were stiffened with steel struts, and on his feet were asphalt spreaders' boots. The outfit weighed a combined 21 kilograms (Karloff lost roughly half that during shooting); and the make-up took three-

and-a-half hours to put on and another hour and a half to remove.

Frankenstein's box office success inspired the requisite sequels — notably, *Bride of Frankenstein* (which some critics claim is the best of the Karloff/Frankenstein films) and *Son of Frankenstein* — as well as a host of imitators. But Universal had wisely taken out a copyright on Jack Pierce's make-up, and Frankenstein monsters that did not have the patented look simply fell flat on their faces at the box office.

Karloff, meanwhile, went on to greater successes (another important role he immortalised was that of *The Mummy*) throughout a 50-year span until his death in 1969 at 82. Several films paired him with Bela Lugosi, by then reduced to playing second fiddle to Karloff.

Lugosi's career had touched bottom early on. In 1943, he donned the Frankenstein monster make-up for a team-up with Lon Chaney Jr in *Frankenstein Meets the Wolfman*, barely 12 years after he had rejected the role at the height of his fame.

Chaney Sr, Lugosi and Karloff shine as the three great lights among the important horror stars. To a lesser degree there would be Lon Chaney Jr in the 1940s, who would capitalise on the till-then largely ignored theme of lycanthropy in a host of Werewolf movies. To lesser degree there would be Vincent Price in the early 60s, in a series of quickie productions desecrating Edgar Allan Poe classics.

Perhaps the abiding legend of the Phantom, Dracula, Frankenstein (and the men who immortalised them on the screen) owes more than is realised to the industry system that ruled their day. Studios owned their stars; they could trap them at will — and often did — in any role that had even moderate success at the box office. In these days "typecasting" is an actor's dread and it is difficult to imagine any reasonable actor making claim to the title of "horror star".



Book Reviews

Creature Features Movie Guide

by John Stanley
Published by Creatures at Large,
California, 1981 Softcover, 200
pages with B&W illustrations.
Review copy from AllBooks \$14.95

Video Screams

by John McCarty
Published by FantaCo Enterprises
Inc 1983 Softcover, 250 pages with
B&W illustrations.
Review copy from AllBooks \$11.95.

John Stanley is a feature writer for the San Francisco Chronicle and he apparently hosts a Saturday night movie session "Creature Features" on an Oakland television station. His book claims to be an A to Z encyclopaedia of the cinema of the fantastic.

Don't take the title too literally. This book contains 2753 movie "reviews" (which are more story outlines) on such subjects as Science-Fiction, Fantasy, Horror, Weird Mystery, Psychoterror, Suspense, Gore Murders, Arabian Adventures, Superheroes, Monsters, so his definition of Creature-Feature encompasses a pretty wide range.

I was most surprised to find films like *Dr Strangelove*, *O, Lucky Man*, *The Wizard of Oz* and the James Bond films included in this list. It is a very unusual mixture, with many odd inclusions and equally strange omissions.

There are two glaring faults. Very little effort has been put into researching cast, director, writer, or general production details: well over half the films listed have no details at all. The second fault, is in the omission of any index. All in all, the book is a pretty slack effort, but the lists appear to be reasonably comprehensive.

Video Screams is much better, although much more limited in scope. It covers 650 titles of horror films released on video cassette in the USA.

John McCarty writes for a number of film magazines, and his book *Splatter Movies: Breaking the Last Taboo*, is supposed to be the definitive history of the gore film.

McCarty takes the trouble to research his subject. He gives us alternate titles, year of release, director, lead players, running time and a very brief review.

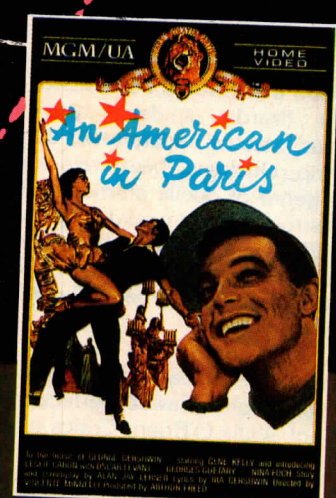
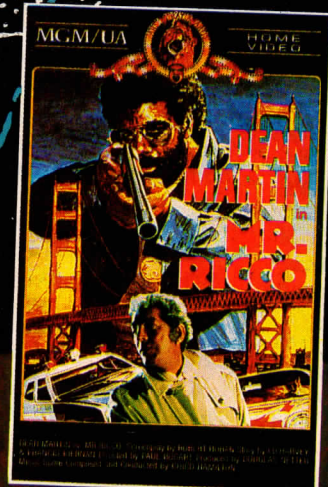
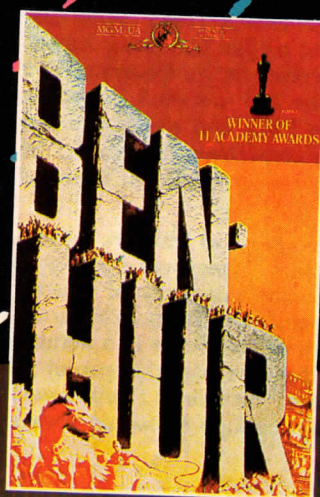
Again, we find the author padding out his listings. I really can't see how *The Bugs Bunny/Road Runner Movie* finds its way into an encyclopaedia of horror cassettes — but maybe I've missed something.

Stewart Fist

MGM/UA
HOME VIDEO

Looking Good in '84

ASK
FOR THE NEW
M G M HOME VIDEO
CATALOGUE AT YOUR
LOCAL VIDEO STORE
NOW!



The rise and fall of the horror movie is a cyclical process. It results from the genre's need for fresh blood in the form of ever-more frightening monsters and special effects, and the tendency of producers to exploit a proven formula until audiences tire of it. Every horror movie has a "creature" as its focus — whether it's a man-created (or unearthed) monster, or a psychopathic teenager. When no new monsters are forthcoming, the genre lapses. In the second and concluding part of our history of horror films, Tom Salisbury charts the highs and lows of horror movies from the 1930s to the present day.

THE 1930s were a banner decade for cinema horror. For one, they marked the first use of the term "horror film". And in 1937, the stiff upper-lipped British censors saw fit to introduce an "H" (for "horrific") certificate to effectively protect their minors against films considered to be too "horrific in nature". It amounted to an official imprint on the horror film industry, as effective in enhancing its mystique as the salacious "X-ratings" of today.

In the 1930s, too, the cinema spawned another horror "star" of a different size and mettle. He was described to Fay Wray, who was to play a leading role in the film, as "the tallest, darkest leading man in Hollywood." Naturally, she thought of Clark Gable.

Her "leading man" was, of course, King Kong, in a film billed in many books as the "greatest of all film fantasies." It was a \$625,000 epic, which was a generous budget in those days. *Kong* took three years to shoot and set the stage for a new generation of man-menacing monsters that would eventually encompass every imaginable creature that walked, crept, flew, swam, or crawled or seeped across the earth.

Soon there would be monster turkeys, giant lizards, spiders, grasshoppers, worms, moths, scorpions, dogs, rats, shrimp, chickens, bees, rats and birds. The genre of docile animals turned into monstrous beasts would thrive well into the 70s — sometimes with a touch of genius, as in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*; more often, with the painfully heavy hand of the ridiculous.

The 50-foot Kong brought in the artistry of technical special effects, honed to only slightly-flawed perfection by the skill of Willis O'Brien. Critics today tend

to forgive Kong's fluctuating height from scene to scene, and cite instead the film's grand finale of the giant gorilla making his last stand atop the Empire State Building against an onslaught of pre-war army planes — a scene now referred to as a "classic" that has spawned the ultimate flattery of countless imitators.

Despite the success of *King Kong* and his more humanoid ilk, the Hollywood horror gristmill was wearing itself thin. The first ominous knell was sounded when established monsters like Dracula, Frankenstein and the Mummy were made to face the biggest horror of all: a team-up with slapstick comedians Abbott and Costello, in a series of appalling monster send-ups.

It was grist for the box office mill, but it effectively blasted the aura of mystique,

and reduced the legends to little more than stone-faced straight-men to Bud and Lou's buffoonery.

The flagging monster industry received a shot in the arm in 1941 when Lon Chaney, Jr put on yak hair and a rubber snout to become movie history's third *Wolfman*. (The first werewolf reared its hairy head in 1913, and was laid to rest 22 years later when Henry Hill essayed the role, with only tepid results, in *Werewolf of London*.)

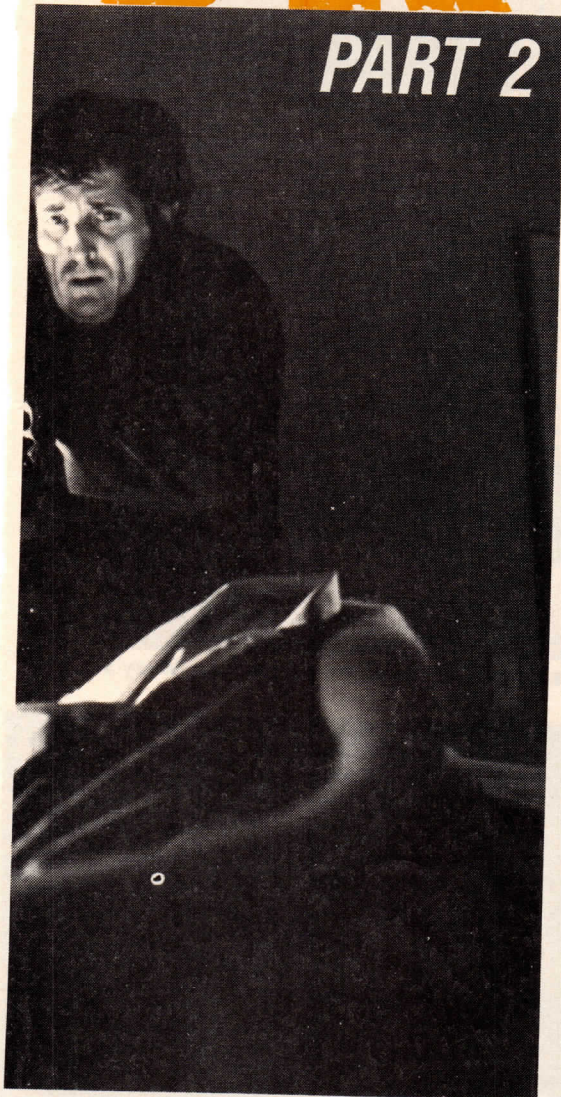
Before he agreed to take his father's name, Creighton Chaney was a bit player consigned to the purgatory of cowboy oaters. He finally found stardom in horror, recreating his werewolf role in a number of sequels (he also ran the gamut of monster roles, including Frankenstein and Dracula, although he would always

HORROR



OR

PART 2



The Exorcist marked a watershed in horror cinema.

afterward refer to the Wolfman fondly as "my baby"). But while Chaney Jr's fame followed the same trail, critics maintain he had none of his father's genius.

Chaney's werewolf was another masterpiece of that make-up wizard, Jack Pierce. Union rules may have changed since his father's time, but Chaney Jr suffered just as exquisitely for art's sake. The painstaking application of cotton to his stretched skin, letting it relax into wrinkles, and then the pasting on of yak hair, a few strands at a time, took six hours. Chaney's transformation from man to wolfman (accomplished in 21 separate make-up changes) took a murderous 22 hours to film, during which he had to remain absolutely motionless.



Horror-movie "heavies", Lon Chaney Jnr (above) and Vincent Price (below).



The werewolf's commercial success was salutary, but ephemeral; in time it, too, met the fame of its illustrious companions and was forced to a humiliating encounter with horror's nemeses, Abbott and Costello.

From then on, it was open season on silliness. A look at the titles turned out in succession demonstrates the absurdities that were conceived. There was *Billy the Kid vs Dracula*; *Jesse James Meets*

Frankenstein's Daughter; and the thought-provoking *Werewolf in the Girls' Dormitory*. Having exhausted all the possibilities of "meetings" between Dracula, Frankenstein, the Werewolf, the Mummy and any combination thereof, Hollywood scenarists had to find new depths to plumb. From this dismal stage, it was only a small step to such epic inanities as *I Was a Teenage Frankenstein*, and *I Was a Teenage Werewolf*.

Godzilla

The next horror frontier would be staked out by a people who had borne the brunt of 20th century technological devastation. *Godzilla*, born in Japan in 1954, was conceived as a scaly holdover from the dinosaur age awakened from its millenium rest by an A-bomb blast.

Back in Hollywood, the movie industry had already caught on to the space-age theme, churning out a series of potboilers on alien visitors from outer space. The first "It" alien, *The Thing* (subtitled *From Outer Space*) arrived in 1951. Of the lot, however, only one film — George Pal's well-conceived 1953 adaptation of H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* — has withstood the test of time, and is today well regarded by the critics.

Hand in hand with the "Its" came the radiological mutants: a giant spider in *Tarantula* (1955) who was ultimately dispatched, King Kong-style, by the US Air Force; irradiated ants in *Them!* (1954); and a horde of giant grasshoppers in *The Beginning of the End* (1957).

In terms of endurance and box office appeal, they were all dwarfed by the

Continued on page 6

HORROR

Continued from page 5



unconquerable Godzilla, who was to be resuscitated in dozens of sequels to wreak havoc on Tokyo, Yokohama, and all points east.

Godzilla was the creation of Japanese special effects man Eiji Tsuburaya, who dominated his country's horror film industry throughout Godzilla's lifespan and that of lesser imitations. Crude animation effects and a bent for the hysterical scenario reduce the Godzilla films' stature in retrospect; but if nothing else, they redefined the new limits of horror audiences' tastes.

Roger Corman

Taste was already scraping the bottom of the barrel; it is no accident that the majority of films listed as among the all-time worst are of the horror genre (see **Video Mag** Aug/Sept 83). More dismal depths were yet to be reached, and some critics maintain that they were "breached" in Roger Corman's Grade B remakes of the Edgar Allan Poe classics.

Roger Corman remains a significant figure in the Hollywood scene, to this day he champions the cause of the quickie movie.

He has since turned his talents to the currently more commercial themes of sex and violence, Grade B movie-style.

In the 1960s, under the banner of American International Pictures, Corman produced a series of Gothic-horror cheapies that amounted to crude

King Kong the monster of all monsters actually only came up to Faye Wray's navel.



bastardisations of Poe's tortured genius; all capitalising on the Poe legend. Many bore little resemblance to Poe other than the title to the actual stories.

By a quirk of fate, Corman struck a responsive chord among the teen-aged drive-in movie crowd: his films flourished at the box office. An added bonus for the studio was that Corman was a living legend as a corner-cutting producer, for whom a two-week shooting schedule and

a cast of more than five people were rare luxuries. One of his films was shot in two days!

Corman's star was Vincent Price (sometimes supported by Peter Lorre, whose moon-faced, bug-eyed looks made him a favourite horror character actor). Price, by then a veteran of many films, had already established himself as a horror star of sorts: notably in *The Fly*

Continued on page 8

HORROR

Continued from page 6

(1958), based on a prize-winning short story by George Langelaan; and five years earlier in the memorable *House of Wax*, which brought the wonders of 3-D to the horror film. (An interesting sidelight to *House of Wax* is that its director, Andre de Toth, showed a remarkably incisive flair for 3-D detail despite the fact that he had only one eye. Pressed for comment, de Toth is reported to have said, "Beethoven couldn't hear music either, could he?")

A remake of a 1933 hit (*The Mystery of the Wax Museum*), *House of Wax* had Price as a macabre, diabolically inclined waxworks owner. His unmasking at the film's climax as a grotesquely disfigured face had echoes of Lon Chaney's *Phantom of the Opera*, and established Price's niche in the realm of the horror shocker. This niche was consolidated with the Price-Corman-Poe troika, and Price became the next — and ultimately the last — of the horror stars.

Hitchcock

One name to dominate recent horror film history has been that of Alfred Hitchcock; although if one were to split hairs, it would be pointed out that Hitchcock's metier was the suspense-thriller rather than true horror.

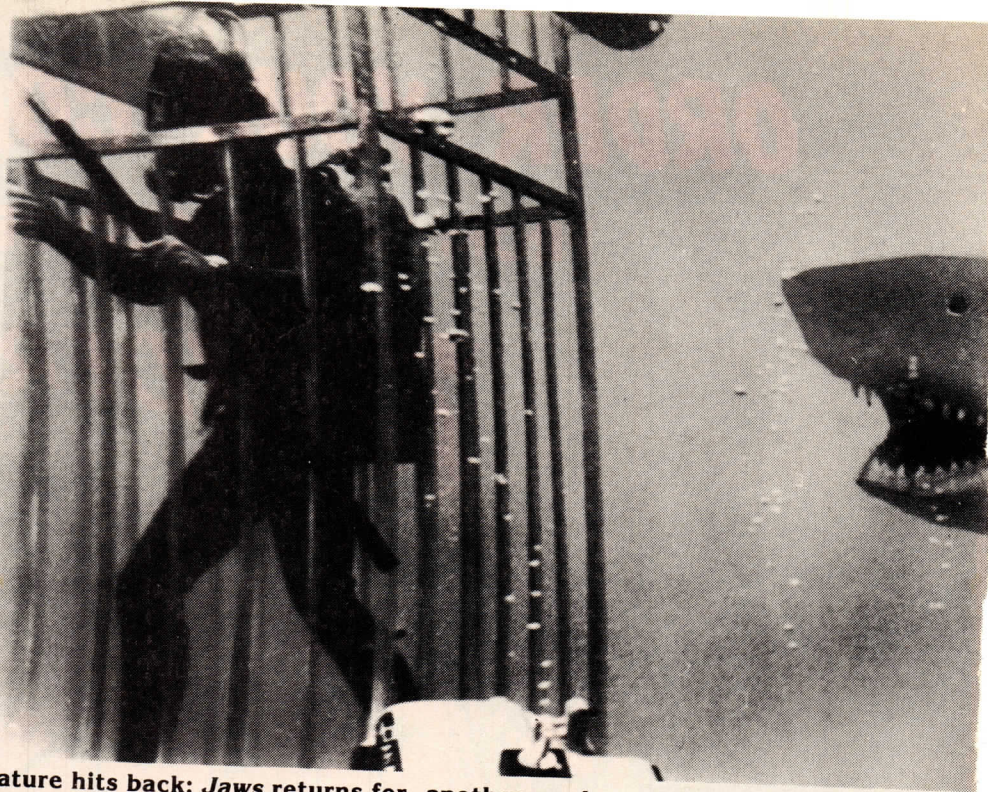
His two exponential "horror" films most often cited in the anthologies are *Psycho* and *The Birds*.

Closer to the pure horror theme have been the works of later products — and progenitors — of the "new wave" cinema, such as Roman Polanski and, more recently, Brian de Palma. Since the late 60s, a more sophisticated and intellectually demanding audience has placed a most unexpected star — the movie director — in the ascendancy.

Polanski flirted briefly with the vampire theme in the satirical *Dance of the Vampires* (1967) before going on to do the commercially and critically successful *Rosemary's Baby* the following year. De Palma has had his own score of successes, notably *Carrie* and *The Fury*. Steven Spielberg, cinema's newest enfant terrible, rates a mention for *Poltergeist* and for *Jaws*, described by historians as the most famous of the monsters from the sea.

Of these three big "names" in modern-day horror cinema, perhaps only de Palma has contented himself with specialisation in the genre (although he, too, shows signs of branching out — at least into the companion theme of violence — as evidenced by his recently completed *Scarface*).

Polanski and Spielberg have preferred to explore other avenues, presumably



Nature hits back: *Jaws* returns for another meal . . .



. . . and Tippi Hedren tries to save her coiffure from staining by *The Birds*.

dreading the stigma of being "typecast" as horror craftsmen. Despite the patina of respectability their distinguished work has restored to horror cinema, there are not many big names among the industry's top directors who would like to be too strongly identified with the form.

The modern trend toward realism and the cynical perspective in films has put a bit of a damper on horror, which after all, has at its core the quality of the ingenuous. Vampires, werewolves, ghosts, monsters from the deep and things from outer space, all require a childlike suspension of disbelief. In these days of blase cynicism, they are at best high-camp entertainment.

Yet the roster of notables who, at one

time or another in their careers, hopped onto the horror bandwagon, is surprisingly long. No doubt many among them would like to forget their brush with the "aweful" and the "supernatural".

Actor-producer-director Michael Landon, of course, is well remembered as the hirsute title role in 1957's *I Was a Teenage Werewolf*. John Carradine (these days better known as the father of David "Kung Fu" Carradine), featured prominently in horror films of the 40s. Raymond Burr played in *Godzilla* before becoming Perry Mason. David Niven donned fangs in 1974 for a *Dracula* spoof, *Vampira*, and Oliver Reed was the shaggy-haired one in 1961's *Curse of the Werewolf*. James Arness of "Gunsmoke" fame was Hollywood's *The Thing* in 1951. And even Humphrey Bogart got into the act with *The Return of Dr X* (1939). Karl Malden tried his hand at horror in *The Phantom of the Rue Morgue* in 1954, and would you believe Anne Bancroft in an ape-suit for *Gorilla at Large* (1954)?

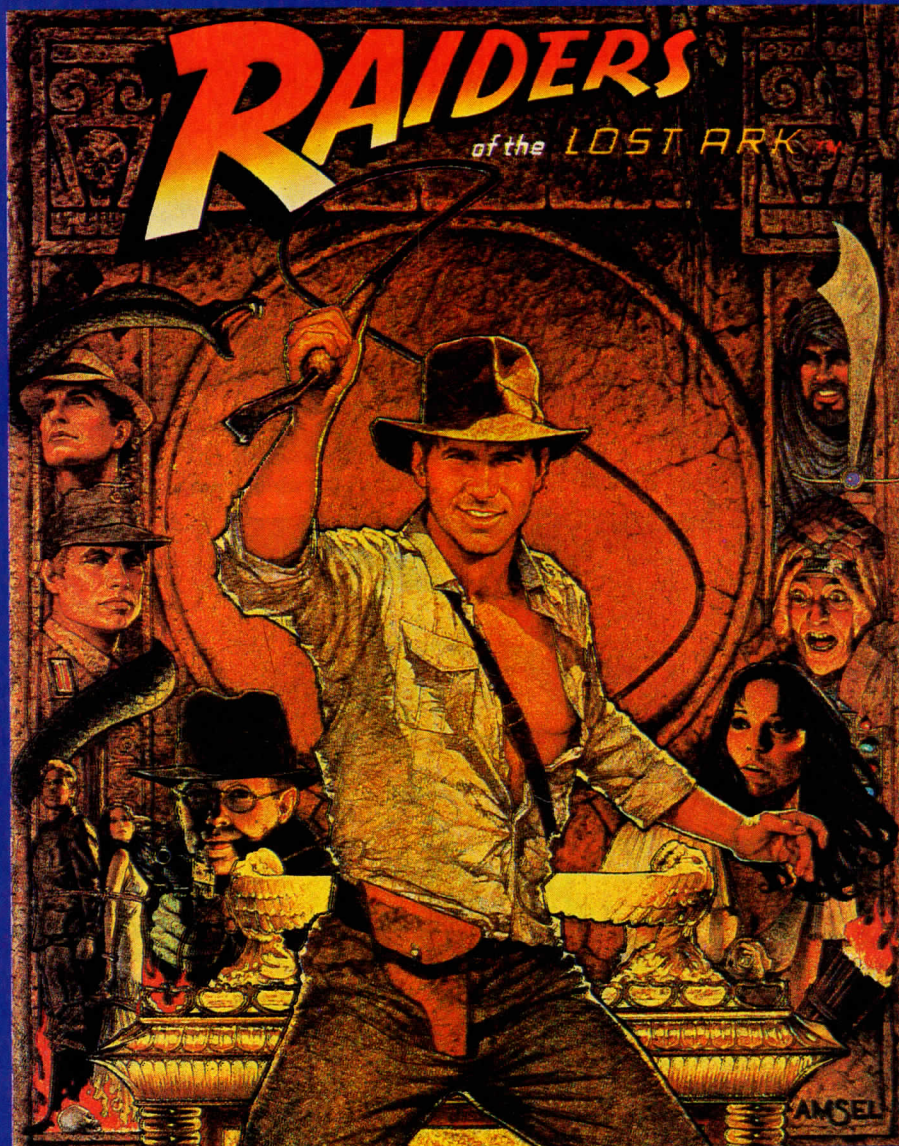
Current-day macho superstars also flexed their horror muscle in their early careers. When the monster mutant *Tarantula* (1955) had its climactic showdown with the US Air Force, the head of the triumphant jet squadron was Clint Eastwood — at that time not big enough to be listed in the credits. And in Vincent Price's *House of Wax*, one of the most menacing waxwork "dummies" in his showcase was a young, and decidedly villainous looking, Charles Bronson.

Modern Horror

Recent forays into horror have included *The Exorcist* and the *Omen* trilogy — dealing with themes of demonic possession and the Antichrist,

ORDER YOUR COPY NOW!

FROM YOUR VIDEO RETAILER



\$49.95 RR

COMING TO A THEATRE NEAR YOU IN MID 1984

INDIANA JONES
and the
TEMPLE OF DOOM™

talkback

Fair Reviews

I cannot understand why you have someone review a horror movie when they obviously don't like that sort of thing. In your review of *Night Warning* we were told it was voted Best Horror Picture of 1982 by the Academy of Science Fiction, Horror and Fantasy. I can't believe that a movie receiving this award would not have some redeeming qualities, but according to your reviewer there were none.

Whether or not you like this type of thing you should remember that many people do like horror movies and would like to read a constructive review, not just a send-up.

Lisa Kurko, Gosford, NSW

Mail-order Rip Off

I've been an avid reader of your very fine magazine since the first issue but I'm a little perturbed to notice that you apparently fail to check the *bona fides* of advertisers.

I have recently had a dealing with one, and find that it is operating a very lucrative mail order service which borders on a blatant swindle.

I ordered four video movies from these people and paid \$75. After two weeks I received two movies and two pre view movies, totalling 55 minutes in running time. These had been copied onto a cassette with no labelling or titles whatsoever, and were the third or fourth copy of copies with resultant loss of colour and contrast and very poor sound. The phrase "Super Quality Guaranteed" is part of their blurb!

You would be doing a good service to your readers if you would stop publishing their advertisements in your future issues.

R. Langton, Coniston, NSW

The Advertiser in question is no longer with us. We have had a number of complaints in the past about this person, but all have been for late delivery. When we checked back later, in every case the complainant had finally recieved the goods.

We have to have a reason other than

late delivery to justify removing advertisers. So if you don't get satisfaction from any advertiser in our magazine, don't just let the matter pass. You owe it to your fellow readers to follow up with a complaint to the magazine in writing. We can't act on telephone complaints, we need signed letters from people listed in the Electoral Rolls.

If you are ordering cassettes by mail, the best safeguard is to check that the company has been advertising regularly over a number of issues. If they have been in business for more than a six months, then you have every chance that you will get prompt delivery and a good product. — Ed.

Replacement heads

I am a regular reader of your magazine and found the recent article on Video Tape and Head Wear very interesting.

I have replaced the heads on my VCR, which is VHS format and eight months old. It has not had a great deal of use.

The technician at the repair shop attributed the "pitting" of the heads to inferior quality tapes, purchased overseas. The only brands I have used are Maxwell and TDK, with the exception of a Yamamoto. Since the

X-ray worries

Browsing through some old magazines recently, I came across an article which expressed some concern about X-ray radiation from colour TV receivers. It was new to me and set me wondering whether it was a real problem and, if so, whether it's been resolved or simply ignored?

William Fern, Orange, NSW

X-ray emission became a possible problem with the development of colour television receivers because of the higher voltages required by colour TV tubes. Actual measurement in the immediate vicinity of some early receivers revealed the existence of detectable — although not necessarily harmful — quantities of X-rays, and this was enough to cause alarm.

Poor reception

About a year ago I moved an old but still serviceable TV to our holiday cottage on the north coast. When I went up there a couple of months later, the picture came up torn into horizontal strips. The set has no horizontal hold control, but it righted itself after a few minutes.

On the next two visits I was not so fortunate. Each time I had to put in a service call and have the set adjusted internally.

Why would a set suddenly start to behave like that?

Stan Islington, Croydon, NSW

It would seem the line oscillator circuitry in your set is unstable to the point where it will no longer lock automatically and reliably to the incoming signal.

One possibility is that, over the

Yamamoto tape was run through only once, could it be responsible for ruining the heads? I have not used it since, because I would not want the new heads to suffer the same fate!

Arthur March, Wallsend, NSW

Assuming your VCR was not exposed to household steam, sprays, or a draught of salt-laden sea air we wonder how the heads could really become pitted. It is

It turned out the main source of the X-rays was, as often as not, the valve-type high voltage rectifier was commonly used in the early receivers. Improved shielding helped matters, but the problem was virtually eliminated anyway by the subsequent adoption of solid-state rectifiers.

All this happened before colour TV was introduced in Australia, and it can reasonably be assumed that radiation does not exist at problem levels in TV receivers used in this country.

Incidentally, if it was going to be a problem it would be of more immediate concern to people who have to work all day and every day in front of video display units connected to computers, information sources and so on. While there have been plenty of arguments about stress, posture, lighting, eye fatigue and so on, the risk from harmful rays does not appear to have been sustainable.

respectively — that would seem to bring the horror film full circle to where it all began, with Melies' *The Devil's Castle*. The vampire remains a steadfast favourite, however, with more films devoted to the species than to any other man-menacer. Perhaps the reason for its resilience is its personification of pure evil; Dracula and his ilk are not objects of pathos, a facile lack of ambivalence they share with the demon.

Some speculate that the vampire's enduring popularity is due more to the subtle eroticism inherent in the neck-biting theme. Indeed, the most recent spate of vampire films (exemplified by *The Vampire Lovers* in 1970) skirts the periphery of the sexually explicit, with the anatomical object of attack transposed, as one historian put it, "from neck to nipple". Filmmakers have also not been above raising the Transylvanian flag in the cause of civil rights, as in 1972's *Blacula*.

High Camp

In their early careers, Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee kept the Dracula/Frankenstein fires burning, only to abandon the field when high camp took over. In the last decade, the most commercially successful (and critically acclaimed) have been the take-offs of these once deadly serious characters. George Hamilton finally won rave reviews and box office bankability by playing a tongue-in-cheek Dracula in *Love at First Bite* (1979); the British carried on with *Carry on Screaming* (1966); and Mel Brooks scored one of his biggest hits with *Young Frankenstein* (1974).

The theatre of the macabre has come a long way since the days of the Grand Guignol, that 19th century Parisian chamber of blood-and-gore horrors. Yet curiously, as with the return to the demonic theme, blood and gore appears to be coming back in style, with an unmitigated vengeance. A few examples are in the unrelenting violence and bloodshed of such films as *Evil Dead*, *Rosemary's Killer*, *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th*. For some, it seems more gargoyles than Grand Guignol.

Opportunities for excessive bloodletting are rife in manic-killer themes, as also with zombies (first explored with considerably more restraint in the 1930s), and even ESP. In *The Scanners*, a huge international hit at the beginning of this decade, powerful thought waves shatter a man's head in scrupulously explicit, slow-motion detail. It is a theme updated recently in *The Bells*.

Blood and gore is by no means a new discovery; the advent of Technicolor gave it its first impetus and, as the history books say, blood has been running bright



Symbolism is the essence of horror movies.

red ever since. Before audiences were spoiled by the luxury of living colour, there was more room for relatively bloodless themes like *The Invisible Man* (which made a star out of Claude Rains), and the much-praised *The Incredible Shrinking Man*: films which relied more on technical trickery than on ketchup effects. Since then, however, the limits of bloodletting seem to be redefined with each new movie.

Judging from the current crop, the operative axiom would seem to be: the higher the potential wave of audience nausea, the better the chances at the box office. Even Spielberg's *Poltergeist* pandered to the fad with a number of scenes that showed a liberal dose of grue.

New Generation

Some historians lament the passing of an era when the worst and most dreadful horror was that which was suggested rather than played out on screen, allowing the viewer's imagination to take over and embellish according to his own nameless terrors.

But a new generation of horror audiences is at the tills, raised without puritan influences and inured to the stark realism of everyday wars. For them, blood and gore are but an incidental and predictable heritage.

The devotion to gore has not been without its highlights. *The Exorcist*, which for many marked a watershed in modern-

day horror cinema, broached the possibilities of gory special effects other than standard blood-red: the sight of a transmogrified Linda Blair spitting out green bile is one of the film's most lasting images. And in the surprisingly skilful *An American Werewolf in London*, which resuscitated the theme of lycanthropy for the 1980s, the chillingly realistic make-up had the distinction of garnering the first Academy award for make-up in the history of the Oscars.

Perhaps it was the aura of respectability conveyed by *American Werewolf's* Oscar that has further opened the bloodgates in the last few years. In recent films the distinctions between pure horror, sex-and-violence and just plain carnage have blurred. Cannibalism — which mixes the three quite nicely — is enjoying a good run; depravity and countless derivations thereof are a new territory currently being charted.

Style and content may have changed radically; but purpose has remained constant since that first night when Melies' Mephistopheles arose out of the darkened Theatre Robert Houdin. That abiding purpose has been to strike terror into the heart of man, who has always willingly welcomed it. The hypnotic fascination for the unknown, the unexplainable, the horrifying, is one of the most primeval and pervasive of human instincts, and the horror film will always be around to feed that fascination — and to thrive abundantly on it.